

THE INTERNATIONAL CRIMINAL COURT
HEARINGS BEFORE THE COMMITTEE ON INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS, HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES, ONE HUNDRED SIXTH CONGRESS, SECOND SESSION, JULY 25 AND 26, 2000

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Mr. SMITH of New Jersey. The concept of a permanent International Criminal Court charged with prosecuting the gravest of crimes against humanity is not a new one. The idea was proposed and dismissed after the conclusion of the Nuremberg and Tokyo War Crime Tribunals that followed World War II.

In recent years the idea has gained new momentum, driven largely by memories of the horrific crimes committed in Rwanda and the former Yugoslavia. I share the ideals of many ICC supporters. If we could construct an entity that would impartially prosecute only genocidal tyrants and war criminals I would support it without hesitation, but we do not inhabit an ideal world. The difficulty is in devising a system that will prosecute Pol Pot, but not President Clinton, that will indict Ratko Mladic but not Norman Schwartzkopf.

I am concerned that the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court fails to accomplish that goal and that it is susceptible to serious abuse and manipulation.

As it took form, the draft statute ballooned from an instrument focused on well-established war crimes into an encyclopedia of still-emerging human rights law. The resulting statute is a 30,000 word document that covers 77 pages. It contains sweeping language that leaves many elements of vaguely defined crimes up to the imagination of international lawyers.

For example, according to article VI the crime of genocide includes, "causing serious mental harm" to members of a, "national, ethnic, racial or religious group."

It is true that similar language is contained in the Convention against Genocide, but the United States took a reservation to the jurisdiction of the World Court over the definition of genocide. This is not because we intend to commit genocide, but because the United States was unwilling to surrender its sovereignty to a body that might be manipulated by hostile parties using the vague language of the convention as an ideological hobbyhorse.

Similarly, article V asserts ICC jurisdiction over the, "crime of aggression"—an offense that is not defined in international law or even in the Rome Statute itself, a point that I made repeatedly at the OSCE parliamentary assembly in Bucharest earlier this month. In the context of domestic law, such vagueness would be problematic. In the more combative context of international law it is dangerous.

In addition to the problems posed by its vague definitions, the statute also claims a jurisdictional reach that is without precedent. Once 60 countries have ratified it, the statute claims ICC jurisdiction over any defendant who may have committed a crime in a signatory state regardless of whether the defendant's own state has ratified the treaty. By claiming to bind the subjects of non-signatory states, this self-executing, potentially universal jurisdiction directly challenges traditional concepts of national sovereignty.

Finally, the Rome Statute gives the ICC prosecutor a vast amount of personal power with a minimum amount of oversight. The statute drafters rejected a U.S. proposal that the prosecutor only be allowed to proceed on cases referred either by a sovereign state or by the U.N. Security Council. Instead, the ICC prosecutor may initiate investigations and prosecutions on his own authority with-

out control or oversight by any national or international party.

Under article 44, the prosecutor may also accept any offer of, "gratis personnel offered by nongovernmental organizations to assist with the work of any of the organs of the Court."

I have long been a supporter of the important work undertaken by International NGO's, particularly relating to the protection of human rights and the provision of humanitarian relief, but it is also true that there exist hundreds of highly ideological NGO's who look to international bodies to promote agendas that go far beyond the domestic political consensus in their home countries. The combination of the independent prosecutor's extreme discretion with staff provided by well-funded extremist NGO's could lead to serious problems and partisanship by the ICC. These are but a few of the problems that I have with the present form of the Rome Statute.

I readily acknowledge that many, probably most, ICC supporters do not intend for the Court to be used as a club for U.S.-bashing or as an engine or radical social engineering, but once the ICC is established it will take on a life of its own. Its activities will be restricted by the language of the Rome Statute itself rather than by the best intentions of its most responsible supporters, and I just would say finally, Mr. Chairman, as you know, I take a back seat to no one in promoting—in the past and present—both the Rwanda War Crimes Tribunal and the International War Crimes Tribunal for the Balkans.

When we were holding early hearings in our subcommittee as well as on the Helsinki Commission I offered language and amendments to boost the U.S. donation to those important tribunals and so I take a back seat to no one, but this I think has some very real problems that need to be addressed. I yield back.

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Mr. SMITH [presiding].

Let me ask a few questions and then I will yield to my friend, Mr. Berman, if he has any further questions.

You mentioned checks and balances that exist within the Yugoslavian War Crimes Tribunal. Do those same checks and balances also exist in the Rome Statute?

Ambassador SCHEFFER. Congressman, there are many more checks and balances in the ICC statute, and I can go into some of those. But the power of the prosecutor is much more qualified within the ICC statute. The principle of complementarity, which is nowhere found in the Yugoslav or Rwanda Tribunal statutes is a central feature of this particular Court.

And, furthermore, this Court, the ICC, depends upon the states parties to the Court to actually make very important decisions relating to the Court, whereas, the Yugoslav and Rwanda Tribunals look to no governments whatsoever for their decisionmaking.

Mr. SMITH. Let me ask you what kind of checks and balances there are. In terms of elected officials, our Founding Fathers, I

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think, were right in vesting only limited power in each of the three branches, being so distrustful, as they were, of any single entity being given so much power. Power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely.

What happens if a prosecutor and/or judges were to run amok and to engage in an ideological crusade against certain individuals? I think we already have a shot across the bow when lawyers brought action against NATO for alleged war crimes, that our planes were flying too high, putting additional civilians at risk, the choice of targets, which they

seem to disagree with. A war crime then potentially could be in the eye of the beholder. Because, again, I do think there is some true elasticity to these terms.

Yes, Mrs. Del Ponte did not accept and did not proceed on those charges, but some other prosecutor may not be so favorably inclined. You might want to comment on that. Looking back, if the Rome Statute were in effect during World War II, for example, and we dropped the bomb on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and we did the firebombing of Dresden and the other German cities with a huge number of civilian casualties, would that be construed as a war crime under the plain meaning of the Rome Statute?

Ambassador SCHEFFER. Well, Congressman, it is far too speculative to try to get into that. Remember that during World War II, the question is, were those actions violations of codified or customary international law at that time?

Mr. SMITH. That is not the question I am asking.

Ambassador SCHEFFER. No, I know.

Mr. SMITH. Fast-forward those military actions that this country undertook with our Alliance.

Ambassador SCHEFFER. It is entirely speculative to say we would use exactly the same military tactics today as we did during World War II. I would not speculate in that direction, not at all. We are far more precise—

Mr. SMITH. But there is no doubt a reasonable man or woman could use the Rome Statute in cases analogous to matters of historical fact, where military decisions were made which resulted in huge casualties. Thankfully, at least, the consequence of Hiroshima and Nagasaki was the ending of the war. But there is an argument that has been made ever since as to the advisability of those actions.

I think it is fair question. Past is prologue. We may be faced with this in the future. We all know that NATO, in terms of its war doctrine, would rely on superiority, at least during the Soviet days, rather than quantity. Quality was what we would rely on. There is the potential that a United States President, or a French President, or a British Prime Minister may have to make a decision some day to use nuclear weapons. It is not beyond the realm of possibility and it is not highly speculative. Those things have to be thought through.

Since we have the historical record, I think it needs to be plugged in to see whether or not this would have triggered a war crimes prosecution.

Ambassador SCHEFFER. Well, we were careful in the drafting of the statute, as well as the elements of crimes, to establish very high barriers to actually launching investigations and prosecuting the crimes. Not isolated incidents, there has to be systematic widespread events. There have to be plans and policies to directly assault civilian populations. If military necessity dominates the reasoning behind the use of any particular military force, then that is in conformity with international law and it is in conformity with the statute.

But if you are asking me, speculate as to whether or not it can conceivably be drawn that the United States takes a particular type of military action without describing what the intent was behind it, the plan or the policy behind it, I can't answer questions like that because you have to go through every step of the analysis before you can answer whether or not this statute would actually apply to that particular use of military force.

Mr. SMITH. Well, one of the more perverse outcomes would be that our military strategists would be faced with factoring in not